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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #1014/01 1031126
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 131126Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2671
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001014

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2019

TAGS: [IZ](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)

SUBJECT: KARBALA COUNCIL SITS, ELECTS NEARLY ALL-DA'WA SLATE

REF: A. A) BAGHDAD 433

[1](#)B. B) BAGHDAD 3008

Classified By: Deputy Polcouns John G. Fox, reasons 1.4 b/d.

This is a PRT Karbala Reporting Cable

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a low-key ceremony at the Government Center on April 11, the outgoing Karbala Provincial Council (PC) formally ceded authority to the new PC. In the new PC, two Da'wa lists control 18 of the 27 seats. All except one of the top officials elected by the new Council are affiliated with Da'wa. This dominance of the provincial levers of power suggests that the political infighting that stymied progress in the old PC will be a thing of the past. It also poses potential dangers, with minority members of the Council probably unable to challenge the majority's agenda effectively. Information may be more tightly controlled. One knowledgeable observer expressed concern that, within Da'wa's blossoming power lie the seeds of dictatorship. End Summary.

Da'wa Domination

[1](#)2. (SBU) Karbala's new PC formally received the reins of power from the outgoing PC at the Government Center on the morning of April 11. Aside from the new and old PC members, the approximately 250 attendees included qadah (district) and nahiyah (municipal) political figures, tribal shaykhs, former governor and current UNAMI representative Ali Kamonah, Local Governance Program (LGP) coordinator Mustafa Tawil, and members of the PRT. Notably absent were members of the judiciary, particularly Chief Appellate Judge Abid Nour Farhan al-Fatlawy, and Iranian Consul General Ridha Khoda Wardiyan (who we were told would make an appearance). The event was low-key and marked by the usual speeches and platitudes. We were buoyed by the comments of several attendees that the peaceful transfer of power here was a victory not just for democracy and Iraq, but also for the United States.

[1](#)3. (C) The most striking feature of the new PC is the clear Da'wa domination of it. From Da'wa proper come Governor Amal al-Din al-Hir and Deputy PC Chairman Naseef Jassim Mohammad. From Hope of the Two Rivers (a Karbala-only list led by former Da'wa members) come two brothers: PC Chairman Muhammad Hameed al-Musawi and First Deputy Governor Abbas Hameed al-Musawi. The sole non-Da'wa affiliated PC member in a leadership position is former Ba'athist-era deputy governor Yousif Majeed al-Haboubi. He now serves as second deputy governor. As we have reported, Da'wa and Hope have buried the hatchet and there appears to be no significant political difference between them. (Note: The Hope list was formed by the Musawi brothers after then-Governor Aqeel Mahmoud al-Khazali ousted Karbala ISF commander MG Ra'ad Shaker Jawdat al-Hasnawi, his rival as Da'wa's top man in the province. Ra'ad's eminence grise, MAJ Ali al-Musawi, remains a potent force within the local ISF and is the brother of Muhammad and Abbas. He is related to PM Nouri al-Maliki by marriage; we believe his sister is the Prime Minister's wife.

End Note.)

Good News and Bad

14. (C) Da'wa's control over the provincial levers of power suggests that the political infighting that hobbled the former PC will be a thing of the past. This is good news for the numerous reconstruction and development projects (former Acting PC Chairman Abd al-Al al-Yasiri put the total at 200) that the outgoing Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee handed over, with great ceremony, to the new PC. (Note: In his remarks, Yasiri seemed intent on countering critics who have derided his feckless tenure by pointing out that many of the unfinished projects begun on his watch will come to fruition on his successor's. End Note.) In the short term at least, it also is good news for the PRT, which has enjoyed good working relations with Da'wa members of the PC, including Governor Amal al-Din (who was a member of the previous Council while also serving as Director General for Agriculture). Judging by our limited contact with the Musawis thus far, we believe they share Da'wa's generally pro-business outlook and friendly -- if not entirely open -- attitude toward the United States. Dealing with Da'wa members in Karbala should be relatively easy; they are increasingly adept at presenting themselves as reasonable, secular, conservative nationalists. Their links to Maliki provide the promise of national-level support in overcoming some of the bureaucratic obstacles that (to give Yasiri his due) have impeded progress on reconstruction here.

15. (C) Da'wa's domination of Karbala's PC holds potential

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dangers. Honest politicians are as rare (or rarer) in Iraq as anywhere, but we were struck at the ceremony by how many PC members whom we judged to be upstanding citizens either did not seek, or failed to win, reelection. Their places in the new Council largely have been filled by Da'wa party functionaries and others beholden to the party (such as erstwhile Fadhilah Party PC member Bushra Hassan Ashour, who won reelection on the Hope list). We are troubled by what we hear from trusted contacts. As might be expected for the brothers of arguably Karbala's most-feared man, the Musawis have a reputation for it thuggish behavior. Governor Amal al-Din is said to have profited handsomely while serving as Agriculture Director General and now reputedly ranks among the wealthiest civil servants in the province. We are mindful of a comment made by local UNAMI representative Ali al-Kamonah -- as thoughtful and knowledgeable an observer of the local scene as there is -- to the Team Leader on April 11: &Within Da'wa's blossoming power, there may be the seeds of dictatorship.8

Comment

16. (C) We are concerned that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and Muqtada al-Sadr-affiliated Council members (who together control only eight of the 27 seats) will have no ability to check Da'wa's one-party rule within the PC and hence might be tempted to take their differences to the streets of Karbala. We are underwhelmed by Yousif al-Haboubi, the sole independent personality. In his quixotic demand for the governorship as the top vote-getter, and his subsequent acquiescence in accepting the second deputy governorship, he failed to display the kind of steady, statesman-like spine we believe is necessary for him to serve as the PC's watchdog.

17. (C) Da'wa's domination of Karbala presents opportunities and challenges. We expect that the PC committees and Directors General will be far more focused than their predecessors on completing projects than on scoring political

points. We believe national-level attention will raise the province's profile, attracting additional resources and, possibly, investment. Karbala will enjoy a direct line of communication with Da'wa party officialdom in Baghdad. On the other hand, we have lost several contacts that have been able to give us a good picture of the provincial government's inner deliberations. We suspect that, despite the fine words of several of the speakers on April 11 promising transparency, Da'wa will -- perhaps even before the first criticisms have been leveled -- circle the wagons, preventing prying eyes in the media and elsewhere from knowing what, exactly, Karbala's leaders are up to. End Comment.

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